

*John Sayles and Maggie Renzi '73 visited Williams early in March, 2012. While there, they showed their latest film, Amigo, at Images cinema on Spring St., and John read from his new novel, A Moment in the Sun.*

President Adam Falk's introduction of John was glowing and personal, and follows below:

On behalf of our program in American Studies, I'm thrilled to introduce John Sayles, who will present his novel *A Moment in the Sun* and his film *Amigo*. These works suggest important new directions in American Studies. As we work towards highlighting and advancing our teaching in this field, and in Asian-American studies as well, we're actively looking at examples of work that builds on the civil rights legacies and social justice work upon which the field was founded. We're very excited to have this chance to encounter Sayles' works, which are at the forefront of transnational thinking in this important discipline, and which can help us reflect on the effects of U.S. empire, both historically and in the present. Sayles' practice is not only at the cutting edge of this thinking, it's also deeply grounded in another tradition valued by American Studies: the tradition of the public intellectual. Tonight's event is sponsored by American Studies, with additional support from the departments of English, Art, and Political Science, our programs in Latino Studies, Asian Studies, and International Studies, and by the lecture committee. We're especially grateful to Sandra Thomas and Images Cinema for hosting and helping to organize this evening.

John Sayles, Williams College Class of 1972, is the author of four novels and two short story collections. Moreover, he's the director of 17 feature films, produced by his partner, Maggie Renzie, Williams College Class of 1973. He began his career working with the nation's most acclaimed and prolific creator of B movies, Roger Corman. Sayles began his directing career in 1979 with *The Return of the Secaucus Seven*, and his early films like *Lianna* and *Brother From Another Planet* helped define the terms of American independent cinema, proving that the idea and the story of a film can be more important than its budget. His 1990's work gained an even wider audience, with films that included *City of Hope*, *Passion Fish*, *The Secret of Roan Innish*, and *Lone Star*, among others. Throughout his career, Sayles' films have relied on a thick sense of place and a complex sense of the United States as a series of regionalist worlds, dense with particular histories, ways of living, and overlapping effects of empire. This is only increasingly true in his most recent films, like *Sunshine State*, *Honeydrippers*, and the film you will see tonight, *Amigo*.

I've been a great fan of John Sayles ever since, as a college student, I stumbled into the astonishing and wonderful film *Brother From Another Planet*. Given the fantastical premise of the movie – an escaped slave from outer space lands in Harlem at the terminus of his own Underground Railroad – it may sound odd to say this, but it was the truth of the film that captivated me. The multiracial New York that Sayles depicts is populated by real humans, rather than by ethnic stereotypes. Given what I'd been exposed to up to that time, it was revelation to me that you could make movies like that. And that truth remains a hallmark of Sayles's remarkable work, from *Return of the Seacucus Seven* to *Matewan* to *Eight Men Out*. I can't overstate my own gratitude at seeing the world of early 20th century baseball, which I fell in love with as a child, brought so vividly and robustly to life, with every detail – physical, cultural, linguistic – firmly in place.

Discovering other fans of John Sayles is always a special pleasure. Sometimes I'll just throw out

the line “I didn’t ask for the anal probe,” just to see if anyone in the room knows what I’m referring to!

John Sayles’s remarkable talents are, of course, not really a secret. He’s a MacArthur Fellow and an Academy Award Nominee. He’s a recipient of the John Steinbeck Award for his fiction, the John Cassavettes award for his films, the Eugene Debs Award for his contributions to social justice, and a lifetime achievement award from the Writers’ Guild of America. Please join me in welcoming John Sayles back home to Williams.